

# 14 Million Trees Have Been Cut Down In Scotland To Make Way For Wind Farms

By David Bol



21 wind farms have been constructed on forestry land

NEARLY 14 million trees have been chopped down across [Scotland](#) to make way for wind turbines.

The Scottish Government expects to generate 100 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources this year – but concerns have been raised about finding a balance between green energy and sustaining forests.

Now statistics, released by Forestry and Land Scotland, show that 13.9 million trees have been axed to make way for 21 wind farm projects since 2000.

Six of the wind farms have been built in Argyle and Bute and three apiece in both Dumfries and Galloway and East Ayrshire.

The Highlands has seen three wind farms built in place of trees, as has Moray - while South Lanarkshire has had two wind farms constructed in place of forestry over the last 20 years.

South Ayrshire's Arecleoch wind farm has also been built at the expense of trees.

The Scottish Government has moved to reassure that more trees have been planted, but it is unknown what proportion of these are mature plants that play a bigger role in turning carbon into oxygen.

A Scottish conservation charity, which has planted almost two million trees across the Highlands, believes that both wind farms and trees are key to reducing carbon levels.

Steve Micklewright, CEO of Trees for Life, said: "It seems deeply ironic that trees are being felled to make way for windfarms when both healthy growing forests and renewable energy are important in resolving the global climate emergency."

"Woodlands that are ancient or of high conservation value should not suffer from mass felling because other rare and endangered plants and animals can be lost too. In other locations, such as plantations where the trees would have been harvested anyway, a pragmatic approach would be to ensure the timber is used for buildings or other uses that will not release the carbon stored in the trees back into the atmosphere."

More than 3.5 million trees have been chopped down in Argyle and Bute since 2000, 2.3 million across the Highlands and Islands and more than 800,000 in the Grampian region.

Half of all energy produced, including heating, is set to be provided from renewable energy by 2030.

As of the end of 2018, the total capacity of all renewable electricity in Scotland, including wind and solar, was 10.9GW.

A spokesman for Forestry and Land Scotland, said: "Renewable energy and forests are key to Scotland's contribution to mitigating [climate change](#) and FLS is successfully managing both elements.

"The figure for trees felled for windfarm development on Scotland's forests and land, as managed by FLS, over the past 20 years is 13.9 million. However, it should be noted that these trees – being a commercial crop – will have eventually have been felled and passed into the timber supply chain in any case."

They added: "That figure for felled trees should also be contrasted with that for the number of trees planted in Scotland over the years 2000 - 2019, a total of 272,000,000, and renewable energy developments fit well with this.

"To date, the amount of woodland removed across Scotland's national forests and land, managed by FLS, for windfarm development is not even one per cent of the total woodland area."

Concerns have also been raised that peatland is being dug up to make way for the wind turbines. Peat bogs are capable of storing around 10 times more carbon per hectare than other ecosystems.

Lyndsey Ward, a Highlands wind farm activist, said: “Not only are millions of CO<sub>2</sub> absorbing trees being felled for turbines, hundreds of thousands of acres of ancient carbon-holding peat are being dug up too.

“These figures are astronomical enough, but if you add in the infrastructure requirements and grid connections, many more trees will have been sacrificed and peat lost as remote wind factories are connected to a grid that cannot cope with them.”

The Scottish Government has pledged to cover more than one fifth of Scotland’s land area with trees by 2032 in a bid to help tackle the climate emergency.

Last year, the Scottish Government came under fire for a strategy where forestry is converted into farm land – having already missed targets for tree planting.

Around 6,400 hectares, most of it from the Forestry Commission, had been earmarked to help young farmers find their feet in the agricultural industry. But officials insisted that the land was not suitable for forestry.

The Scottish Government said that the number of trees felled makes up less than one per cent of the country’s woodland area.

It said that many “will have been replanted on site”, while some will have been “replaced through compensatory planting by developers”.

The Scottish Government insists that it will plant 30 million trees each year by the end of the parliament, while 36 million trees will be planted each year by 2030.

Last year alone, 22 million trees were planted across Scotland.

Scottish Forestry held a public consultation last month on its draft corporate plan for 2020 to 2023.

The document points to an ambition to “ensure that forests and woodlands are sustainably managed” and an aim to “expand the area of forests and woodlands”.

The piece of work, still to be finalised, acknowledges that “trees play a crucial role in regulating our climate”.